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A SLUM-AREA SCHOOL FACES ITS PROBLEMS WITH A DIFFERENCE.

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AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN A SLUM AREA SERVES AS A TEACHING LABORATORY FOR EDUCATION STUDENTS AT TRENTON STATE COLLEGE (TSC). WITH FINANCING FROM TITLE III OF THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT, THIS SCHOOL-COLLEGE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM HAS INTRODUCED DEMONSTRATION TEACHERS, NEW CLASSROOM TEACHERS, TEACHING AIDES, A BILINGUAL TEACHER, AND VARIOUS ANCILLARY PERSONNEL TO A SCHOOL WHOSE REGISTER IS 90 PERCENT NEGRO AND 8 PERCENT PUERTO RICAN. THERE HAS BEEN A NOTICEABLE INCREASE IN PARENT PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL ACTIVITIES AND A DECREASE IN VANDALISM SINCE THE INCEPTION OF THE PROGRAM. TSC IS ALSO INVOLVED IN OTHER PROGRAMS FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE DISADVANTAGED. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN THE "SOUTHERN EDUCATION REPORT," VOLUME 3, NUMBER 9, MAY 1968. (NH)

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A SLUM-AREA SCHOOL FACES ITS PROBLEMS WITH A DIFFERENCE

In 1966, Grant Elementary School in Trenton, N.J., was a typical inner-city school—surrounded by a mostly Negro area of slums, many of its children two years or more behind in learning skills, a shortage of good teachers, the parents of the youngsters up against a wall of ignorance and unemployment or very low income.

Today, Grant School, its students and their parents face most of the same problems but with a difference: the school is now a teaching laboratory of Trenton State College, an institution which emphasizes teacher training. The program this year is financed by a federal grant of $298,000 plus money or services provided by the college and the Trenton school system. An initial grant was for $255,000.

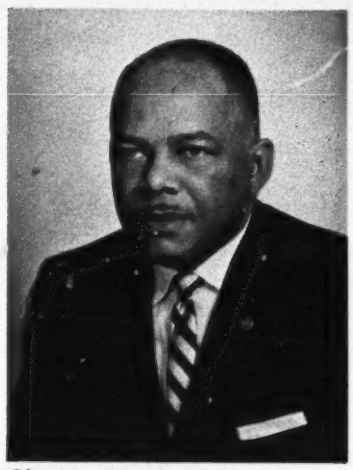
The goal of Trenton school officials is to make Grant the best school possible for its disadvantaged students and to make it a model for others in the city and state.

Trenton State's goal is this but something else—to throw its resources and energies into the problem of educating the children of the ghetto at its very doorstep. Trenton's population is 65 per cent Negro and seven per cent Puerto Rican. Ninety per cent of Grant's pupils are Negroes and eight per cent Puerto Rican.

It is too soon to expect changes in the school work of the 1,000 pupils at Grant School, but the new program has opened a wide doorway to improvement. With the money from Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the program has brought into the school 16 highly qualified demonstration teachers, 20 other selected teachers for regular classrooms, 10 teaching aides, a bilingual teacher for helping Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican students, a nurse, and many supportive personnel such as psychologists, counselors, community relations workers, curriculum specialists and helping teachers.

Heading a list of new instructional materials and equipment is a closed-circuit TV system and a television production studio. With remote cameras in the rooms of the demonstration wing of the school, student teachers and their faculty can first observe a class and then review the teacher's methods on a rerun of the video-taped session. The class of

Leon J. Durkin



Charles E. Williams

future teachers observes in large rooms behind one-way glass.

The impact of the new program may be even greater on Trenton State College and its department of education. The college has an enrollment of 3,100, including 2,600 education majors. From the ranks of the future teachers, 250 juniors spend a semester each in Grant School as part of their regular curriculum. In their senior year, many of them will be student teachers in many of Trenton's other inner-city schools. Each year, five seniors will do their student teaching in Puerto Rico, to give them first-hand experience in working with the students whose cultural and family roots are in the Caribbean island.

Other programs at TSC which show the college's extensive involvement in educating the disadvantaged include one in junior high schools, another for sophomores working with ghetto youngsters in their spare time, Upward Bound and Action Bound projects, and a course in teaching in the inner-city. A Teacher Corps program is being planned.

About two-thirds of TSC's education faculty has some contact with the inner-city problems in the schools where the future teachers study. Many of them are closely involved and some have already requested leaves of absence to take over a classroom in the disadvantaged areas for a year. But TSC is planning even more programs. In the future will be a study course for teacher aides, a program for students who want to teach in Spanish-speaking areas of the city, a high-school equivalent of the junior professional semester at Grant, a model cities program, a master's degree program in urban education, a health center at Grant School and a co-operative project with the Kilmer Job Corps Center.

This summer, there will be a series of seminars at Grant School for a total of 220 teachers in elementary and secondary education, special education, inner-city teaching, and teaching English as a second language.

"A college has to be willing to free manpower, to go all the way. It really is a major commitment," said Dr. Edward Dejnozka, chairman of the department of education at TSC.

"We had a very guilty feeling that we weren't doing our share in doing something for the inner-city," said Dr. Leon J. Durkin, the Trenton State professor of education who conceived of the Grant program and is one of four co-directors of the school in a co-operative venture of the school system and TSC.

The change in attitude is reflected in the young student teachers, many of whom are accepting the challenge of working with ghetto children. "Two years ago . . . nobody [student teachers] came to the inner-city, but now over one-third of our young people are teaching in this area," said Dr. Durkin.

Dr. Sarah Christie, a project co-director and assistant superintendent in Trenton schools, praised the college's involvement in Grant School. "If it hadn't been for the college's interest, we would not have the $298,000." But she also gave great credit to Supt. Richard T. Beck as an innovation-minded administrator. Dr. Christie said "the innovative spirit is up" among Grant teachers.

Proof of the program may be a while in coming, but there are signs that the overall environment has already taken a sharp turn for the better. One measure of this is a change in the attitude of the neighborhood around Grant School.

Vandalism was frequent and costly at Grant in previous years, said Dr. Charles E. Williams, the principal of the school and a Negro. He is the third co-director of the project. "Today, some windows are broken, but not to the extent they were before. "Now, there are maybe four or five while we had 100 or more in other years. There has been a change in attitude."

One reason for the change is the involvement of parents—in PTA programs, high attendance by parents and other adults of an evening school at Grant, recruitment of "floor mothers" from each floor of nearby high-rise apartment buildings to keep liaison with the school, and an adult advisory board.

While all these things may lead toward a better education for children in the Grant area and better teacher training, there is no guarantee of success. Trenton State officials and faculty are ready to share failure with the city school leaders. Administration is shared 50-50 by both sides, each having two representatives on the management team. The fourth team member is a TSC curriculum co-ordinator.

"Whether we succeed or fail, the college stands side by side with the city in the outcome, no matter what it is," said Dr. Durkin. "If the house falls down, it falls on us, too."

"We have an almost total commitment to the inner city as a result of this project," said Dr. Clayton Brower, dean of administration at TSC. "We don't have the answers, but at least we're in there."

Both the school system and TSC may be starting at the bottom of the ladder to success in the inner city. But they are on about the same rung as the Grant students and others like them, said Dr. Williams.

"These kids have no place to go but up," the principal said. ○